

## SSA's Agency Strategic Plan

### **Requirements for a Strategic Plan**

The *Government Performance and Results Act of 1993* (GPRA) first mandated that Federal government agencies develop a strategic plan. The 1993 act required that plans cover a period of not less than five years forward from the fiscal year in which it is submitted, and also that it be updated or revised at least every three years. Recently, the *GPRA Modernization Act of 2010* modified the period that the plan covers to align with the term of the President, requiring that a new plan be posted to the agency's website on the first Monday in February of the first year of a Presidential term.

The new legislation requires the plan to contain the following:

- A comprehensive mission statement covering major functions and operations;
- General goals/objectives, including outcome-oriented goals;
- A description of goals/objectives that includes operational processes, skills and technology, human capital, information, and other resources;
- A description of how the agency-level goals/objectives are relevant to Federal government priority goals;
- A description of key factors beyond the agency's control that may affect the ability to meet goals/objectives; and
- The agency's plans for evaluating its strategic efforts.

An agency should formulate its strategic plan with inputs from OMB, Congress, the public, and the agency's personnel, partners, and stakeholders and, when completed, make the plan easily accessible to all. GPRA states that the preparation of a strategic plan is an inherently governmental function, and the plan is to be drafted only by Federal employees. When preparing a plan, however, agencies may be assisted by non-Federal parties, such as consultants or contractors who are hired specifically to provide technical input on the design and assembly of the plan, and who are not solicited for their input on policy or budget issues. Strategic plans are a matter of public record, so the public should be afforded the opportunity to access the completed plan. The most current GPRA legislation requires agencies to post their strategic plans on a public website.

### **SSA's Agency Strategic Plan**

SSA has been publishing agency strategic plans periodically since it released its first—*2000: A Strategic Plan*—under Commissioner Dorcas Hardy in 1988. In 2008, it published its most recent document, *Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2008-2013*. The current plan defines four goals that will “enable the agency to maintain a strong level of performance on core workloads and

work toward long-term improvement of its service to the public” including: 1) eliminate the agency’s hearings backlog and prevent its recurrence; 2) improve the speed and quality of its disability process; 3) improve its retiree and other core services; and 4) preserve the public's trust in its programs.

In the 2010-2011 timeframe, SSA is working to update its plan and intends to release it in 2011. The agency’s effort is being coordinated by the Chief Information Officer and the Deputy Commissioner of Quality Performance. To date, the agency has discussed the plan with employees and third parties and has used an Internet site to solicit feedback.

### **Social Security Advisory Board’s Comments on SSA’s Strategic Plan**

As SSA was developing its 2008 strategic plan, the members of the Advisory Board voiced a number of concerns, noting primarily that the plan was short-sighted with no clear vision of where the agency should be in the future and how it would get there. The Board members’ concerns, in part, prompted them to develop the December 2008 document, *Challenges Facing the Social Security Administration: Present and Future* (report to the President-Elect’s transition team). In the document, the Board expressed concern that that “the agency has reached a tipping point where continuing to do business with outdated 20<sup>th</sup> Century tools hinders its ability to meet the needs and expectations of the American public,” and urged the agency to “develop a vision that emphasized the integration of processes, invested in a modern technology platform, and developed a highly skilled and creative workforce.”

In 2010, the Board went further in urging the need for a long-range vision. The Board met with a group of experienced SSA managers to work on developing a vision for the year 2020 and beyond. The vision examines the areas of service delivery, information technology, policy simplification, workforce development, and organizational structure and makes the following broad recommendations:

- Rethink the agency’s service delivery strategy and develop a plan that embraces a broad range of delivery options that meets the public’s expectations.
- Perform a comprehensive review of program policy to reduce complexity, improve public understanding and maximize the use of new technology.
- Establish a *Systems Modernization Plan* that will move the agency to a modern technology platform and support enhanced service delivery options.
- Develop a *Human Capital Plan* that matches workforce competencies, training, and career development with new service delivery strategies and technology changes.
- Adapt SSA’s organizational structure to maximize the effectiveness of the transformation taking place throughout the agency.